



**File Code:** 1950; 2700  
**Date:** December 23, 2020

Dear Interested Party

Ashton/Island Park Ranger District of the Caribou Targhee National Forest received an application for a Helicopter skiing operation in the Centennial Mountains. We are going through the application review process to determine if we accept the application for a special use permit. Many steps are included in the process of accepting an application. These steps include scoping or gleaning and processing comments from interested parties including Forest Service specialists; Custer Gallatin and Beaverhead Deerlodge Forests; the activities effects to resources or other recreational activities in the area. Another step includes working with the applicant to refine the application and proposal to respond to comments and to comply with Forest Service special use regulations.

The applicant has requested:

Six to 12 user days with 10 to 12 people per day for the 2021 operating season.

Operating season of January 1 to March 1, 2021.

Operate within the five areas shown on Map 1.

Map 1



The purpose of this project is to validate feasibility of a helicopter ski operation within the Centennial Mountain Range within the allotted areas.

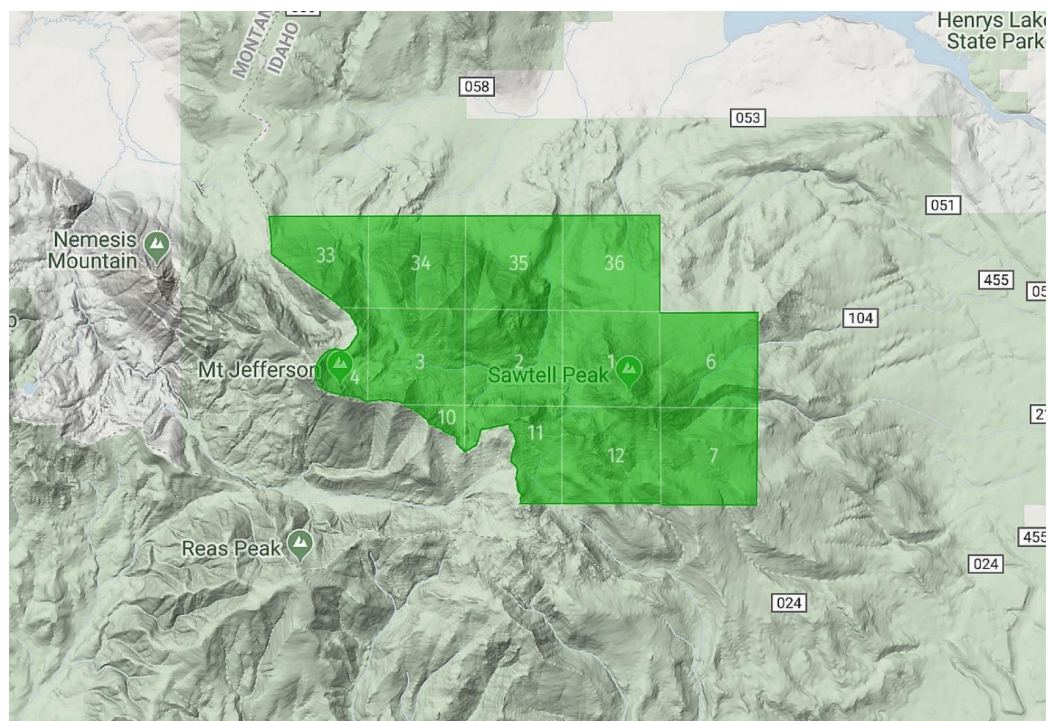
Items I am considering at this time are whether to issue a research permit for helicopter skiing in these Zone 2 and 3 or issue a temporary permit for 2021 operating season.

A research permit would not involve guiding of clients and allow applicant's employees to gather weather and snow pack information in these areas. One to two fixed wing overflights would occur in order for guides to photograph the ski runs and evaluate use patterns by other user's such as snowmobilers. This permit would also include five days for applicant's employees to snowmobile to various slopes to collect snow pack information.

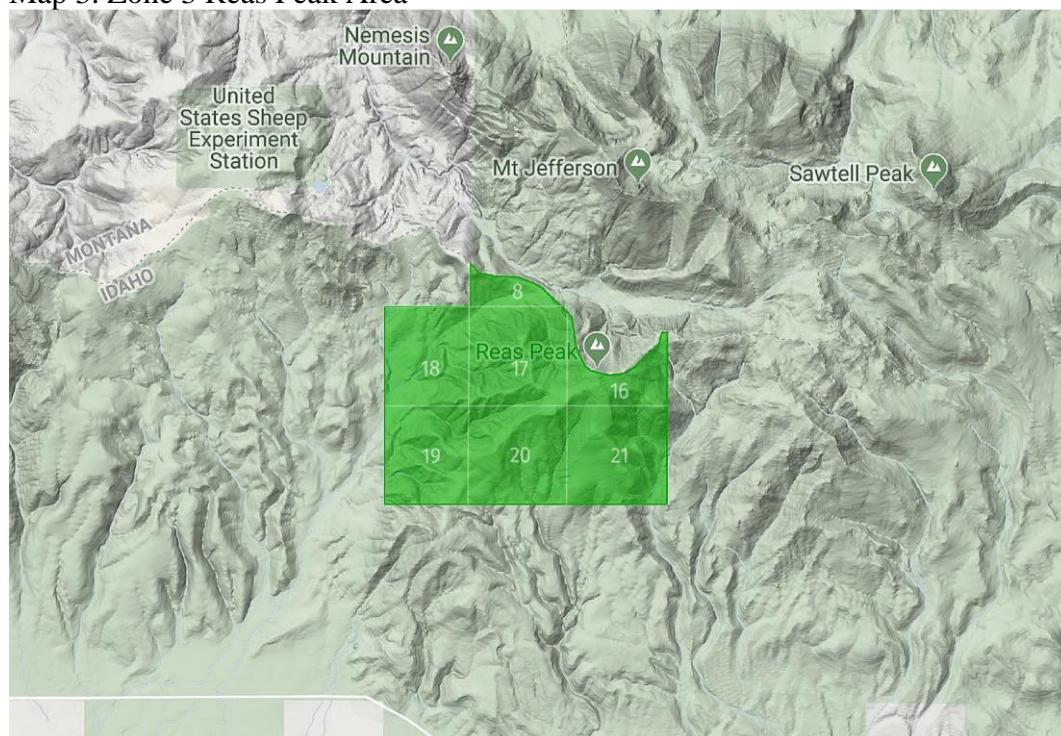
A temporary one season permit would include:

- 6 to 12 days for 2021 operating season
- Operate in zones 2 and 3. The other three zones (1, 4, 5) were eliminated based on analysis in the Biological Assessment due to potential disturbance to wolverines. Zones 1, 4 and 5 are within known female wolverine territories.
- Operate within the proposed operating season of January 1 to March 1, 2021. According to an analysis performed by the District Wildlife Biologist and documented in a Biological Assessment, these dates are within Grizzly Bear denning period. The Biological Assessment determined no effect to Grizzly Bears because this set operating season and helicopters and skiers would not affect denning bears.
- Submit a complete operating plan that includes safety measures, avalanche precautions, qualifications of guides, helicopter landing and pick up areas
- Monitoring system to ensure compliance with all permit measures,
- Idaho guide license
- Avoid conflicts with other users
- Share snow pack data with Bozeman Avalanche Center

Map 2. Zone 2 Sawtell Peak Area



Map 3. Zone 3 Reas Peak Area



Your comments to a temporary permit would be most helpful in my decision making process if I receive them no later than January 15, 2021. Input to the research permit would be most helpful if I receive your comments by January 4, 2021. The input I receive will assist me in making a decision about the temporary permit or research permit or no permit for operating season 2021.

These steps outlined above would provide information both to the Forest Service and to the applicant about feasibility of a longer term special use permit for helicopter skiing in these areas. If the applicant determines it is feasible, the next step is to submit a formal detailed application and I go through the acceptance process again. If I accept the application, then a more in depth environmental analysis would be completed. The opportunity for a priority use permit would also go out to the public for competitive bid to determine other interest in a helicopter skiing permit.

Below are detailed maps of proposed permitted terrain.



## TARGHEE-CARIBOU NATIONAL FOREST POTENTIAL HELI SKI RUNS IN PROPOSED PERMIT AREA:

This document illustrates potential heli ski terrain in Rocky Mountain Heli's permit proposal.

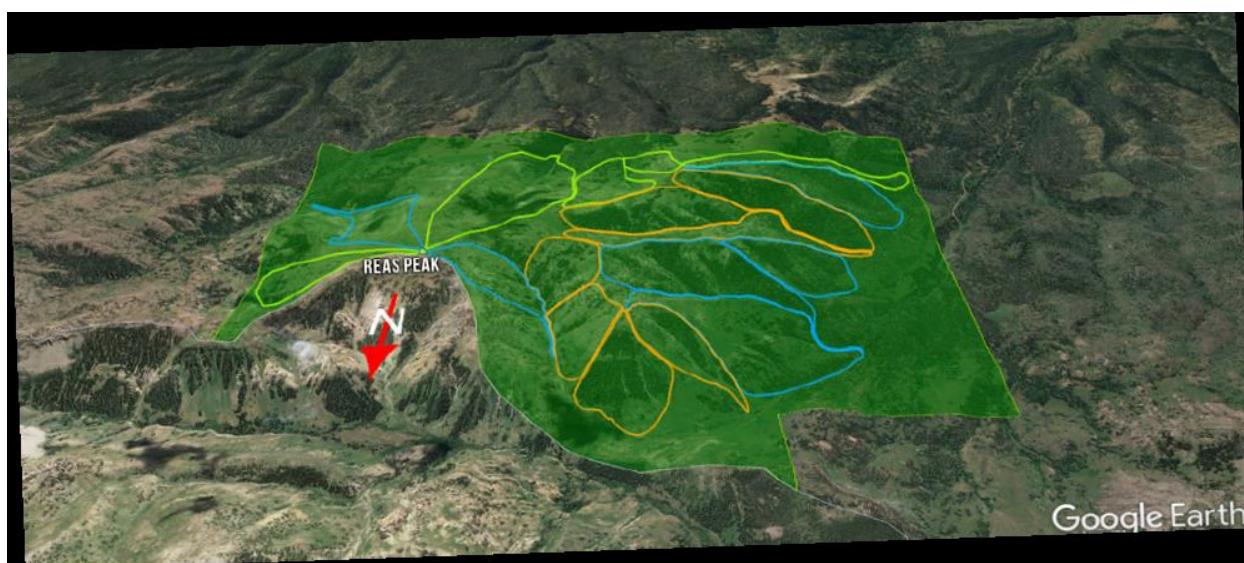
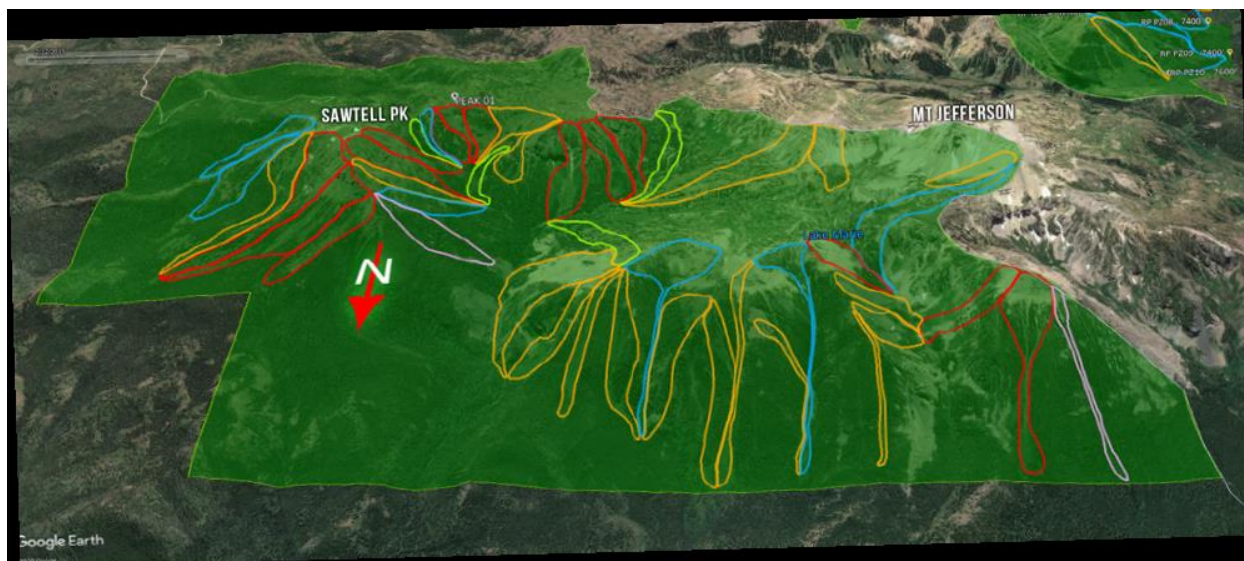
The scale is as follows:

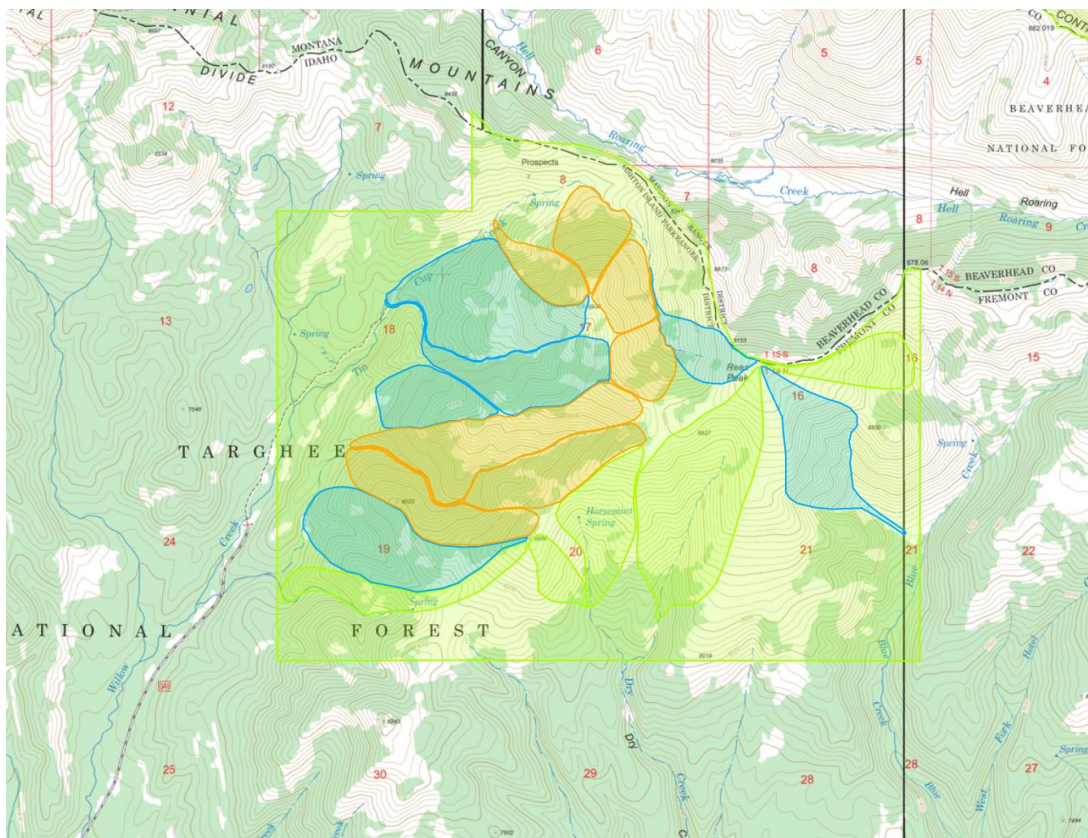
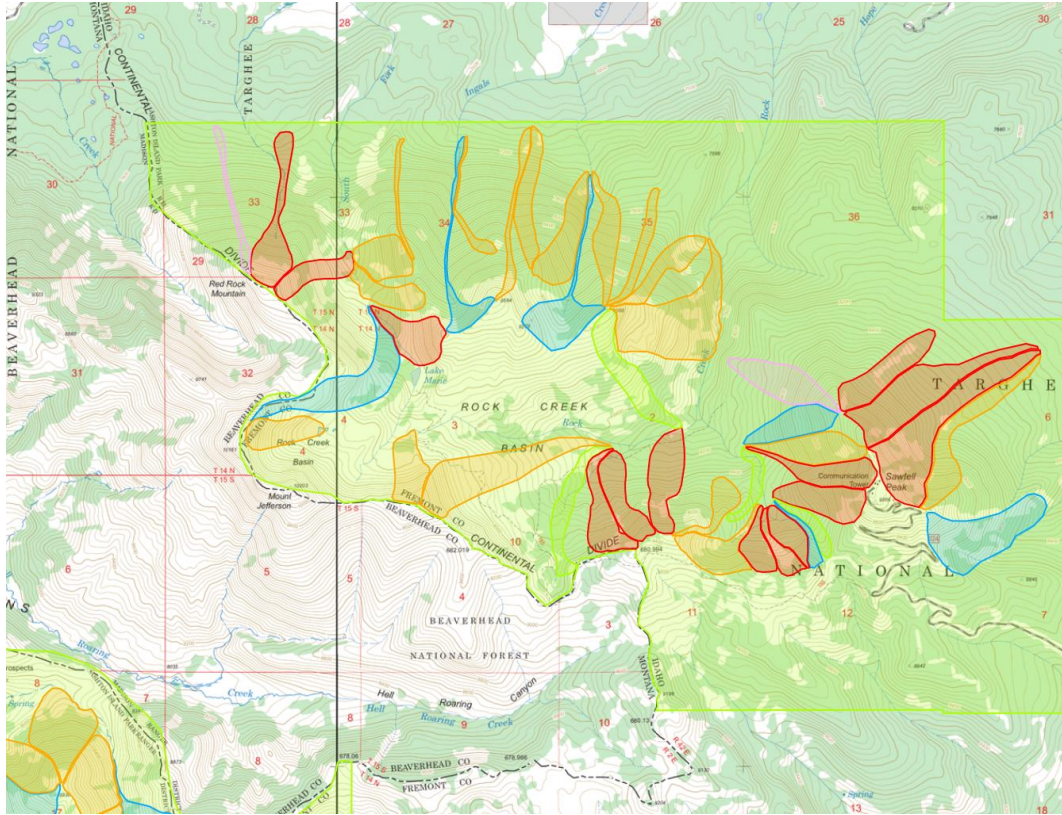
1. **SIMPLE** (coded Green and Blue here)
  - a. Generally low exposure to any avalanche hazard and easy to manage risk while traveling.
  - b. Can travel with minimal precautions or exposure to avalanche hazards.
2. **CHALLENGING** (coded orange here)
  - a. Terrain is exposed to potential avalanche hazards, but also allows for low-risk options while traveling this with good route finding.
  - b. Can travel up to Considerable hazard using appropriate route finding.
3. **COMPLEX** (coded red)
  - a. Terrain may frequently exposure users to potential avalanche hazard with minimal ability to find safe routes.
  - b. Travel generally restricted to Low to Moderate avalanche hazard conditions.

This proposed terrain has not been evaluated for suitability based on:

- Other groups usage patterns (ie: snowmobiles, ski tourers)
- Appropriate snow coverage

Some of the proposed runs while require leveling up Pick-Up Zones using snow to make a level pad.





Sincerely,

*Elizabeth Davy*  
ELIZABETH DAVY  
District Ranger